



Crooked Knife

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TOOLS:

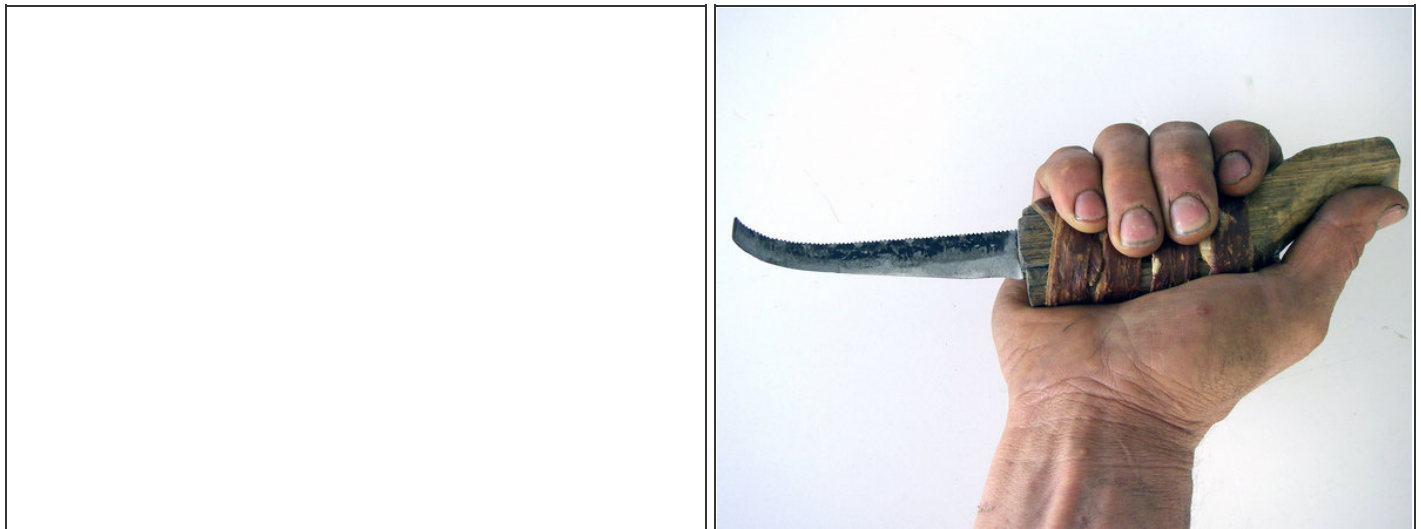
- [Hoof knife \(1\)](#)

SUMMARY

The crooked knife is the northern nomad's woodworking tool. All the northern tribes in North America and Asia have their own version of it. My farm relatives use them to trim their horse's hooves. I think that whatever wave of invaders brought horse culture to Europe must have brought this style of knife with them.

I made this particular knife years ago from plans in the book *Wildwood Wisdom* by Ellsworth Jaeger (1945).

Step 1 — Jaeger's Plans.



- Jaeger's drawings are a bit vague about blade shape (see Plate 88). When you hold the knife as seen in the photo, the side of the tip is bent toward you. The side of the blade facing away from you is left flat; don't grind on that side at all. All the grinding is done on the side of the blade toward you.
- He describes how an Indian craftsman "tempers the blade, hard at first, and draws the temper by heating to a yellow color." By "yellow color" he means a yellow oxide layer, not a yellow heat glow.
- In 1945 everyone would have known exactly what he meant from watching blacksmiths at work. Today these words need further explanation. For more details read *The Making of Tools* (1973) or any other blacksmithing book from your local library.


Step 2



- I made my knife just that way, except I used an industrial hacksaw blade instead of a file for stock. Some saw blades are made with hard teeth and a soft blade, but the back of this one is hard enough to hold an edge without any hardening/tempering.
- I carved the handle from a chunk of an elm tree in our yard that was dying of Dutch elm disease. I wrapped the handle with a strip of elm bark to hold the side plug in place. The wood of the handle shrank and gripped the tang of the blade as it dried, so the whole thing is very secure.
- The handle is a bit small, since my hand has grown a lot since I made it. It fit perfectly at the time, but now that I've seen and used many crooked knives, I would make the handle much smaller where it meets the blade.
- Elm is really nice wood. Like oak it has transverse rays in the grain that prevent it from splitting. It's too bad all those trees died.

Step 3 — Mod a hoof knife.



- The quickest way to make a crooked knife is to modify a hoof knife from a farm supply store. Some pet shops carry them with the horse equipment. The hoof knife tip is for cleaning a horse's hoof. The tip fits into the contours around the "frog," which is the living part of the underside of the hoof. For carving wood you don't need that much of a bent tip.
- Here's how I modded a hoof knife into a crooked knife in about half an hour. I started with a sharpening stone in a leather sheath with Sami glyphs on it that a Finnish friend gave to me. It works perfectly as a sheath for the crooked knife with the blade next to the stone.
- I bought an unmodified hoof knife for \$5.35 from a feed store. It was made in Pakistan and has a stainless steel blade. Non-stainless is usually better. A blade that can rust is usually much better steel. 
- Cut off the end of the handle so it feels better on your thumb. Be aware that hoof knives come in right-handed and left-handed versions. Get the correct kind for you.
- Straighten the blade to suit yourself. Photo 2 shows a finished knife (bottom) next to a stock one (top) for comparison.
- Suit the bend to the work you're doing. The knives used for finishing cedar canoe planks are mostly straight with a slight bend in the tip. The Salmon people use a crooked knife with a very long handle and a very small bent blade. They use it for carving details on totem poles, among other things.

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